

# FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY\*

By Salvador P. Lopez

THE OTHER DAY I came up for investigation before one of the Loyalty Status Boards of the Philippine Army. In the course of the testimony and examination of Lyd Arguilla, her husband Manuel, who was arrested by the Japs in February 1944 and is still missing, was mentioned.

Lyd was testifying about my part in the activities of the Porch which she and Manuel organized way back in the middle of 1942 as affiliate of Marking's Guerrillas. Manuel, she said, was the commanding officer of the unit while she was the adjutant, and they received their instructions direct from Marking and Yay who had placed the group directly under headquarters.

Though I and not he was on trial, the board naturally wanted to know a few facts about Manuel. The board was told he had been a well-known writer, employed before the war in the Bureau of Public Welfare where he continued to work after the Executive Commission was organized in late January, 1942. After the fall of Bataan he went around the provinces with a unit of the Japanese Propaganda Corps. Later he left the Bureau of Public Welfare to accept a job in the Department of Information, Japanese Army, as censor for stage shows. He wrote a few stories and articles in the Jap-controlled newspapers and magazines. On February 20, 1944, he was arrested by the Kempetai, thrown into Fort Santiago,

and later transferred to Old Bilibid where, in the latter part of August 1944, he was taken out, along with about thirty others, never to be seen again.

So much was known from a confidential report on Manuel which an Army operative had prepared and from the few facts which Lyd was permitted to mention in the course of her testimony before the board.

Thus baldly stated, the facts do create a picture of Manuel that is not wholly prepossessing. The Japs took him and perhaps killed him, some people will say, but they may have done so for one reason as well as for another. He went around with the Japs, consorted with them, worked for them; and though he may later have died at their hands, that of itself does not make him a hero.

The story of Manuel is the story of a hero. It is a story of heroism as simple as the peasant Ilocano stock from which he sprang, as rugged as the mountains back of the little barrio in La Union that as the scene of his childhood and the setting of many of his childhood and the setting of many of his finest stories. And I am going to tell it because it is such a story as he himself would have liked to tell, though it is also a story which none could tell half as well as he.

A few days after the entry of Japanese troops into Manila, Manuel told his wife: "Life is not worth living without

\* Reprinted from the Manila Post Magazine

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freedom." There was nothing declamatory the way he said that; it was more like an aphorism whose truth he had discovered anew and was now restating in bitter though not hopeless realization.

I like to think of Manuel saying that, because the words provide the key to all that he did later on, all that happened to him, until that awful moment in Bilibid when he told the Japs to their faces that he was fighting for freedom and democracy—

But I am going ahead of the story.

The point is that from that time on his plans were set. He had seen the face of the invader and loathed it; he had heard the tramp of his booted feet in the streets and he knew that this was his enemy.

He was not a soldier. He intended to go to Bataan, but in the confusion that followed the rapid collapse of Filamerican resistance in Luzon, it had not been possible for him to leave.

Manuel decided that this was his place, that here he too could fight the enemy, at close quarters, with his own weapons.

He went around the provinces with the Japanese Propaganda Corps. It was curiosity, more than anything else, which first led him to undertake such an equivocal and suspicious activity—the insatiable curiosity of a writer who wanted to see with his own eyes and to hear with his own ears the reactions of Filipinos to the shattering impact of the Japanese invasion. Wherever he went he found that the people were sound and steadfastly loyal at heart and the knowledge pleased him because it made him feel all the more certain that redemption would come.

In the Bureau of Public Welfare he gathered a number of trusted employees around him and with their help turned out anti-Japanese propaganda in the office mimeographing machine. This was typical of the daring he showed throughout, the courage that enabled him to accomplish so much under such grave risks, the boldness that was later to prove his own undoing.

Yay, who had escaped to the mountains, needed funds to organize Marking's Guerrillas on a more extensive scale. She sent Manuel bundles of guerrilla receipts to be given in exchange for contributions from loyal and well-to-do Filipinos. Manuel went to work with more enthusiasm than discretion; he would visit members of the Executive Commission who hardly knew him and say:

"I'm going to ask you a favor. I've come to you because I think you are a loyal Filipino. If you are not willing to help, we'll both forget about it. Here's a receipt signed by Yay. She needs money for her guerrilla force. You can write down the amount you wish to give."

Most of the time they took him at his word and gave him what he wanted. On one or two occasions, however, he happened to approach certain officials who thought he was a spy whom the Japs had set on their trail; they therefore notified the Military Police as a measure of protection. In this way, the Arguilla home on Calle M. H. del Pilar was visited by the Kempetai in late December 1943; they turned the place inside out, looking for guerrilla receipts. They found none.

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Watch For —

- "APAT NA ALAS"
- "TAPIS MO INDAY"
- "REYNA ELENA"
- "SATUR"

Coming Soon!

The first familiar face I saw in Tutuban station when I arrived from Capas in January 1943 was Manuel's. He had seen my name in the papers the day before and had come to meet me.

"The Japs want you in the Department," he said. "I don't think there's anything you can do about it."

I knew that, because one week before leaving Capas, I had received an order from Japanese Army Headquarters commanding me to report there upon my arrival in Manila.

Manuel told me not to worry too much about it. He himself was there; besides there was important work that we could do together—"right under the noses of the Japs," was the way he put it.

It was his failure to mind one such exception, I think, that finally got him in trouble.

Sometime in early February 1944, one of our couriers was intercepted. When the Japs let him out a few days later, we knew that they were up to something. The courier sent word to Manuel and Lyd to get out of town at once. That same evening they left their home in Ermita and came to the house to pass the night. They carried a small leather bag and

a portable typewriter; they were leaving next morning by train, they told us, for Pangasinan. Later on, they were going to join Marking and Yay in the mountains. We were worried, and they tried to reassure us. "Nothing is going to happen to you, whatever may happen to Lyd and me," Manuel said. And I believed him.

After two weeks in the provinces, and believing, erroneously as it turned out, that they were not wanted by the Japs, after all, they returned to Manila on a Saturday afternoon. They stayed in their home all Sunday. Monday morning Manuel went to his office—to resign, he said—while Lyd proceeded to her dentist. Shortly after noon, just as he was typing out his letter of resignation form the Hodobu, Manuel was arrested by the *Kempetai*.

Lyd, returning home from the dentist, was intercepted a block away from home by her youngest brother, who told her not to proceed as the Japs were already there. At four in the afternoon, we got her frantic telephone call at the house. We did not know they had come back, and we were surprised to hear her voice over the telephone.

"I have gotten separated from M," she said. "If you see him or can send him word, just say that I have gone ahead."

We never did get word to Manuel again. Two or more days later, when the Japs found out that Lyd had slipped through their fingers, they threw all the members of the Arguilla household into Fort Santiago; his mother, sister, two brothers, and the two-year-old waif whom Manuel and Lyd had adopted. They were released two months later, when the Japs were convinced there was nothing they can do to snare Lyd back to the city into their clutches.

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